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pieces, Gottwald captures the essence of each, with familiar lieder by Schumann and Brahms offered effectively for chorus. Something as familiar as Brahms’s ‘Wiegenlied’ (here entitled ‘Guten Abend, Gut Nacht’) works well in this idiomatic treatment for chorus. Yet the unfamiliar songs – the ones by Robert Franz, Hans Sommer and Peter Cornelius – are intriguing in Gottwald’s arrangements, and invite comparisons with the originals. Beyond the German composers represented here, the two pieces by Debussy (‘Il pleure dans mon coeur’) and Ravel (‘Toi, le coeur de la rose’) offer contrasts to the sometimes conventional German Romantic style, and complement the other selections well.

Among Gottwald’s most adventurous arrangements is his choral version of Mahler’s Adagietto, sung to Eichendorff’s poem ‘Im Abendrot’. Interestingly, Gottwald did not use Rückert’s ‘Ich bin der Welt abhanden gekommen’, which was Mahler’s vocal model for the movement. In this sense, the adaptation involves a double transformation – not only from string-and-harp scoring to chorus, but also from the implied text of the Rückert song about isolation to Eichendorff’s poem about the close of the day and, by inference, departure from life. This takes Mahler’s music further away from the lieder that form the basis for Gottwald’s other settings and creates, instead, a new piece through this extension of the contrafactum technique.

The strength of these recordings is due in part to the fine performances by two different choruses: the KammerChor Saarbrücken, conducted by George Grün (Hymnus an das Leben); and the SWR Vokalensemble, conducted by Marcus Creed (Alma und Gustav Mahler). The choral sound in each recording is uniformly polished and balanced, with the voicings of the arrangements emerging with convincing clarity and blend.

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Fanny Hensel


On 1 June 1835, Felix Mendelssohn wrote a letter to Madame Marie-Cathérine Kiéné, the mother of his childhood piano teacher, whom his sister

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was planning to visit in Paris. ‘It will make you happy to get to know my sister again’, he explained, ‘for she is an excellent woman’. He went on:

At the same time, her talent is so magnificent that if you want to hear music at all now, you will certainly let her play for you often and with pleasure. It makes me sad that since her marriage she can no longer compose as diligently as earlier, for she has composed several things, especially German lieder, which belong to the very best that we possess of song.\(^1\)

Thirty years ago, Mendelssohn’s claim that his sister’s lieder ‘belong to the very best that we possess of song’ might have aroused some scepticism. One might have blithely dismissed the idea, without having listened to enough of her songs to make a valid judgment. Or, at best, one might have set out to prove Mendelssohn right – not, however, by evaluating Hensel’s songs on their own terms but by measuring them against her brother’s, seeking a kind of legitimization via equivalence (as if to say, ‘her songs are better than you’d think; look how much they sound like his!’). Today, we know that Mendelssohn was right: despite being discouraged from pursuing a career as a professional composer and forced to curtail her creative endeavours so that she could keep a home and raise a family, Hensel nonetheless managed to write almost 250 songs, and in the process developed a compositional voice that was as original and assured as any in the first half of the nineteenth century.

Our view of Hensel’s artistic achievement is now more accurate, and more complete, thanks to an outpouring of historical, editorial and analytical research. Scholars have contextualized her life and work, edited and published her diaries and letters, as well as her music (much of which remains buried in archives), and examined the intricacies and wonders of her musical language.\(^2\) But the rediscovery and re-evaluation of Fanny Hensel would not have been possible were it not for the performers who have breathed life into her beautiful music and shared it with a wide audience.

The two CDs by soprano Dorothea Craxton and pianist Babette Dorn are the most recent in a line of recordings of Hensel’s lieder stretching back to the early 1990s.\(^3\) The first, from 2009, covers familiar ground (if such a thing can be said

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\(^2\) There is not space to reference all of this scholarship here, but a few recent and important contributions might be mentioned: on the historical front, R. Larry Todd, *Fanny Hensel: The Other Mendelssohn* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010); on the editorial front, Fanny Hensel, *Tagebücher*, ed. Hans-Günter Klein and Rudolf Elvers (Wiesbaden: Breitkopf & Härtel, 2002); and on the analytical front, Yonatan Malin, *Songs in Motion: Rhythm and Meter in the German Lied* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), especially Chapter 3.

of Hensel’s songs), featuring performances of three of her four published song collections: opp. 1, 7 and 10. If you know any Hensel songs, you will likely know some from these collections, and you may even have in your ear the sound of soprano Susan Gritton and pianist Eugene Asti, who released an excellent CD in 2000 containing all four collections in their entirety.

Craxton and Dorn’s performance of the six songs of op. 7 bears favourable comparison with Gritton and Asti’s. Indeed, their account of Hensel’s famous Nachtwanderer, op. 7, no. 1, is one of the best I’ve heard. The tempo is suitably relaxed – neither too fast nor too slow – which enhances the nocturnal mood; Craxton sounds lovely in her lower register and knows when to hold back her vibrato for expressive purposes. They also take an appropriately nocturnal pace in the penultimate song, the exquisite Bitte.

Unfortunately, their performances of opp. 1 and 10 don’t measure up nearly as well, mostly because Craxton’s voice lacks the warmth and lustre of Gritton’s. Her high notes (above about F) are often strained, and some songs are marred as a result. Gondellied, op. 1, no. 6, is a prime example. The song has a satisfying lilt: Dorn’s continuous semiquaver figuration is as fluid as the Venetian waterway it depicts, and Craxton’s singing conveys passion but also a measure of sweetness. But already by the end of the first phrase the F’s on ‘Mondesprach’ and ‘Gondel’ disturb the sense of calm – the timbre of Craxton’s voice doesn’t fit the mood she seems to want to create. The climactic high A (‘dann schwebt mit uns’) only makes matters worse; her tone is rather more piercing than floating. Craxton’s high A’s in Bergeslust, op. 10, no. 5, seem even more incongruous: rather than striking them gently and then blossoming – as would seem appropriate, considering the crescendo hairpin – she attacks them forcibly. In the same song, Dorn negotiates widely spaced tenths in the left hand by rolling them, but she doesn’t play the upper notes of these tenths in strict time, and the song therefore stumbles rather than gallops. Other keyboardists have managed to overcome this pianistic challenge, either by placing the upper notes squarely on the beat or by playing them with the right hand.

Craxton and Dorn’s second CD, from 2013, makes up for many of these shortcomings – not because the performances are markedly better than those on the first disc, but because they bring to light a number of previously unrecorded and unpublished songs. There are no fewer than ten world premiere recordings, three of early songs that only exist in manuscript: Dir zu eröffnen mein Herz (titled Lied aus der Ferne on the CD) (1825), Maigesang (1827) and Suleika: Wie mit innigstem Behagen (1827). These unpublished songs are anything but forgettable juvenilia. The earliest of the three, Dir zu eröffnen mein Herz, is a true gem (and apparently little known, since it is mentioned neither in Larry Todd’s The Other Mendelssohn nor in The Lied, Art Song and Choral Texts Archive). Written when

4 Op. 1 was published in 1846 and op. 7 in 1847, before Hensel died. Op. 9 and Hensel’s remaining song collection, op. 10, were published posthumously in 1850.

5 For a recording on the fast side of the tempo spectrum, listen to Susan Gritton and Eugene Asti; far on the other side are Lauralyn Kolb and Arlene Shrut.

6 Eugene Asti takes the former approach, Françoise Tillard the latter.

Hensel was not yet 20, it bears all the signs of her mature style, only in distilled form. First, there is the careful coordination of tonality and mood: the song is in B-flat major but turns to minor keys (G minor, E-flat minor and C minor) when the poetic persona experiences feelings of pain, bereavement and doubt; remarkably, it is also directionally tonal – it ends in G minor, underscoring the failure expressed in the final couplet (‘Will ich umarmen/Und kann es nicht’). Second, Hensel elongates key words with melismas: ‘traurig’, ‘Geliebten’ and most dramatically ‘blutet’, whose first syllable is set to a chromatic descent from G to B, over equally chromatic harmonies. (The passage prefigures a similarly chromatic and melismatic descent from G to B♭ in bars 28–30 of Im Herbst, op. 10, no. 4, written over two decades later. Play these two tracks one after the other and you’ll see that Hensel’s late songs, for all their sense of adventure, are not so far removed from some of her early experiments.) Finally, Dir zu eröffnen mein Herz reveals how, to quote Larry Todd, ‘compositional restraint could engender musical and poetic intensification’. These words refer to Seufzer (1827), a spare, haunting lament that echoes the slow movement of Beethoven’s Seventh Symphony. But they could just as well apply to Dir zu eröffnen mein Herz, Am leuchtenden Sommernorgen or Was will die einsame Träne – all early songs – or, for that matter, the late song Totenklage, a setting of Justinus Kerner’s poem about his brother’s death, where the piano’s muted chorale poignantly conveys the unspeakable pangs of grief. Songs such as these deserve to be heard, not only because they open a window onto a world of domestic music-making by women in the nineteenth century, but also because they are good – because they open up unique and profound worlds of expression. Dorothea Craxton and Babette Dorn have done a great service in bringing these works to light. One hopes that other performers will follow their lead.

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Franz von Suppé


The name Franz von Suppé is well known to contemporary wind band players thanks to three frequently performed overtures: Morning, Noon, and

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8 Curiously, Craxton and Dorn emend another song that ends off-tonic: Verlust, originally published in Mendelssohn’s op. 9 collection, which closes on a dominant. Dorn tacks on a D-major tonic, providing an awkward sense of closure to this song that gains such expressive force from its inconclusiveness. I discuss Verlust and its evasive tonality in my article ‘Fanny Hensel’s Lied Aesthetic’, Journal of Musicological Research 30/3 (2011): pp. 179–83.

9 Todd, The Other Mendelssohn, 108.